



**CEPPS/IRI AFGHANISTAN Quarterly Report: January - March 2005**  
**Afghanistan: Establishing Foundations for a Fair and Competitive**  
**Electoral System/ Promoting Politically Active Citizenry**  
**USAID Cooperative Agreement Number: DFD-A-00-00033-00**  
**Project Dates: March 2003 – August 2005**  
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**Project # 8083**

## **I. SUMMARY**

Much of this quarter was devoted to locating and hiring a full-time Resident Country Director to manage IRI's Kabul office and implement IRI's parliamentary election program. In February 2005, IRI hired Robert Varsalone to serve as its Resident Country Director in Kabul. Mr. Varsalone comes to IRI with more than a decade of professional political experience, much of it at the grassroots level. Rob has managed nearly two dozen national and state level campaigns, and has served as an elected representative in the New Hampshire State House of Representatives. IRI believes that Rob's management, communications, and political skills will both complement and strengthen IRI's Afghanistan program. IRI will also benefit from the continued presence of Hal Ferguson who was brought on as full-time Resident Assistant Program Officer in January 2005 after having served as contractor with IRI for more than six months. Hal received his M.F.S. from Georgetown and has a working knowledge of Farsi.

Working closely with other implementers in the field, IRI planned its pre-election activity calendar this quarter. IRI also re-engaged its Shura network, crafted information sessions for potential independent parliamentary candidates, and conducted training for local trainers who will conduct parliamentary elections information sessions in 34 provinces in April.

Using traditional and modern vehicles of communication and exchange, including tribal jirgas and shuras, IRI's work dovetailed with efforts to support political parties by increasing voter awareness about the issues of electoral representation and citizenship, and candidate and leadership knowledge of the priorities and aspirations of the electorate.

## **II. BACKGROUND**

Although decades of civil war, foreign occupation, and communal rivalry have ravaged Afghanistan, great strides have been made by Afghans to reconstruct and reform their war-torn nation since the Taliban was ousted in 2001. While various forces still seek to undermine Afghanistan's democratic progress, most Afghans want nothing more than peace and stability, and hope to see this dream realized in their lifetime. The various cultures, languages, and beliefs of Afghanistan make it fertile ground for democracy to flourish.

In 2001, Afghanistan's main opposition groups drafted a framework for the restoration of stable government in the country. The UN-brokered Bonn Accord, based on the principles of "national reconciliation, lasting peace, and stability," called for the establishment of an interim administration to govern Afghanistan until the appointment of a transitional authority by a Loya Jirga (grand council of Afghan elders).

In June 2002, the council elected Hamid Karzai as the interim head of state until the holding of national elections in October 2004. Between June 2003 and October 2004, President Karzai's interim administration reopened schools, reconstituted the national army and police force, initiated a battle to quash illegal drug production, and adopted a new constitution establishing a democratic Islamic government that guarantees equal rights and protection for every citizen.

The Karzai interim administration was centralized, national, and purely executive in nature. While this served to strengthen the Transitional Authority's decision-making capacity on issues of reconstruction, it came at a price. Prior to the first election, when popular buy-in was most needed, the forces for democratization at the national level were confronted with a disconnected local population, uninformed and vulnerable to the influences and pressures of regressive elements at the grassroots level. This problem remains a particular challenge in the southeastern border region where instability has prevailed since the fall of the Taliban.

Unfortunately, beyond the two Loya Jirgas, there has been little opportunity and few means by which moderate forces at the national and grassroots levels could connect and mobilize on behalf of the democratic process. IRI strongly believed that for a democratic agenda to succeed in Afghanistan, it was critical that the forces of moderation at national and local levels connect, expand, and deepen ties. At the local level, the extent to which success of the democratic process is dependent on the remnants of traditional and communal leadership cannot be exaggerated. A quarter century of conflict and the centralizing tendencies of Kabul governments during this period may have marginalized, at the national level, the bulk of Afghanistan's pre-coup leadership, drawn mainly from the traditional elite, but it has done little to alter communal relationships and customs.

IRI's pre-election programming in Afghanistan was based on the premise that if traditional leadership ("opinion makers") - and the networks of patronage that existed

prior to the upheavals of the late 1970s - were effectively brought into the process of democratization, directly and systematically, through carefully constructed outreach and communication efforts, this target group could deliver the electorate to the polling stations in service of the Bonn objectives.

On October 9, 2004, more than eight million Afghans cast their ballot in the country's first-ever direct presidential election. The day went smoothly and peacefully and President Karzai emerged the clear winner, receiving more than 55% of the votes. Former education minister Yunis Qanooni was Karzai's closest challenger with 16%.

Much of the success of the Afghan elections can be attributed to the hard work and dedication of IRI's local Afghan partner organizations. Election-day turnout, alone, is testament to how successfully their messages penetrated Afghan society. More than three quarters of registered voters cast their ballot on election day – it is clear that Afghans felt they had a stake in the election's outcome.

While Afghanistan's Presidential Election was a success, its democratic transition is not yet complete. In September 2005 Afghanistan will hold its first parliamentary elections in over twenty-five years, during which the final component of the country's national government will be constituted.

Karzai's administration has accomplished a great deal since its establishment, but it will not achieve complete legitimacy until successful parliamentary elections are held. Ensuring this success will be a daunting task for which all the resources of the Afghan government and the international aid community must be marshaled.

### ***IRI PROGRAM HISTORY***

Following the installation of current President Hamid Karzai as the head of the Afghan Interim Administration in December 2001, IRI traveled to Afghanistan to examine the context in which the country's future was being determined. As a result, IRI began to undertake a series of activities aimed at assisting Afghan civil society actors to help in the country's crucial and sensitive transition. IRI began by providing technical and material assistance to three domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that were mostly operating out of Peshawar, Pakistan. IRI moved quickly to assist these NGOs in their repatriation efforts and incorporated these into IRI's long-term programmatic goals.

In March 2002, IRI provided support to the then Peshawar-based Afghan NGOs Coordination Bureau's (ANCB) in its relocation to Afghanistan, allowing the 140-NGO-member group to reopen and expand its Kabul office. At a critical time in the country's immediate post-war efforts, ANCB's transfer to Kabul allowed for its organizational structure and collective expertise to again be based out of the capital. With beneficiaries numbering in the millions of Afghan citizens, ANCB and its member organizations served as a vital link between the citizens and the international donor community. Following the collapse of the Taliban, the Bureau assumed a new role representing the priorities of its beneficiaries throughout the country in direct dealings with the

transitional Afghan government. In the process, ANCB's membership has more than doubled. As of March, 2004, more than 325 Afghan NGOs were affiliated with ANCB.

In an effort to provide Afghans with an objective account of developments in their country during this critical period, IRI also began collaborating with the then Peshawar-based Afghan Media Resource Center (AMRC) and its weekly newspaper *Erada*. With an initial readership on both sides of the border of approximately 6,000 at the beginning of 2002, *Erada* was already circulating in post-Taliban Afghanistan. In order to increase its capacity to play a role in informing the public, IRI support to AMRC allowed the Center to transfer its administrative structure and printing operations to Kabul in mid-2002. Once the installation of a new offset printing press was completed (acquired with IRI support) in November 2002, *Erada* became a daily publication. As of March 2004, the daily's average circulation was 11,000 copies. In January 2004, additional IRI support allowed AMRC to inaugurate a new color printer, a further step in the drive to make *Erada* sustainable. At present, *Erada* is the only independent daily publication in Afghanistan printed in both Dari and Pashtu, Afghanistan's two primary languages.

Finally, IRI noted it was essential to increase opportunities for ordinary Afghans to participate in the very fluid political process. Furthermore, it was evident that after more than two decades of war and destruction, a vehicle for educating the public on matters of democracy and citizenship was needed. To that end, IRI began supporting the Welfare Association for the Development of Afghanistan (WADAN) and its mobile training program to educate community leaders on issues of pluralism and citizen participation.

In addition, IRI established a Regional Shura Network (RSN) with offices and outreach in the country's eight regional administrative centers. RSN provides "marginalized" local leadership with the link to policymakers that has been lacking to date, while continuing its program of civic education and voter mobilization.

The primary purpose of the Regional Shura Offices was to provide: venues for the continued and expanded civic education exercises targeting local opinion-makers; neutral centers for local opinion-makers in each region to discuss and debate local and national issues in the run-up to elections; meeting places for national officials with local leadership; and resource centers for the dissemination of civic and voter education materials to surrounding provinces and districts.

IRI conducted two political public opinion surveys in Afghanistan in 2004; a political opinion poll in June, and an election-day poll October 9. The June survey gauged the attitudes of 2,378 respondents on issues including the constitution, elections, security, reconstruction, national personalities, and overall views of the future prospects for Afghanistan. According to the June survey, the top three issues on voter's minds were security/end of warlordism, reconstruction, and economic development.

Since there were neither extensive nationwide observers on election-day, nor a parallel vote tally due to fears of violence, IRI conducted an election-day poll to provide a measure of confidence in the election process and an eventual check on the outcome. Amid widespread allegations of fraud by the opposition, IRI's poll proved valuable in

demonstrating that no less than 97% of voters polled considered the election either “with some problems but generally good” or “Free and Fair”.

### **III. QUARTERLY PROJECT ACTIVITIES**

January was devoted to re-organizing IRI’s Afghanistan staff: a new full-time Resident Assistant Program Assistant was brought on, and in early February the new Resident Director arrived to supervise the next phase of IRI’s program.

#### ***Independent Candidate Training and Coalition-Building: Phase One***

In late February and early March, IRI conducted a number of assessment missions to the provinces to ascertain the viability of its coalition-building program. Trips were made to Jalalabad, Kandahar, Kunduz, and Mazar-i Sharif, where meetings were held with local elders, women’s groups, and other opinion-makers. In almost every meeting local leaders expressed extreme skepticism and distrust of existing political parties and concern for the outcome of the parliamentary elections. Their response reinforced IRI’s belief that credible local leaders who wished to run for parliament would run as independent candidate not with political parties. Local leaders were very receptive to IRI’s visit and expressed enthusiasm for independent candidate training. These missions were complimented by meetings in Kabul with IRI’s local partner organizations responsible for implementation, and plans for the program began to solidify.

In late March it was announced that the joint Afghan-UN electoral commission had moved the period for the registration of candidates up to the first three weeks in May, some two months earlier than expected. Using experience gained from its road missions earlier in the month, IRI quickly developed a detailed plan and curriculum with which to re-tool the WADAN trainers used in previous civic education programs.

A training session for 55 core WADAN implementers and select provincial elders was scheduled for April 9, after which the WADAN trainers will move into the field to hold information sessions in every province and organize independent candidates for the registration period. A copy of the curriculum to be used by the WADAN trainers is attached.

### **IV. RESULTS & INDICATORS**

Result 1: Improve the capacity of political parties, civic leaders, and civil society organizations to be inclusive and operate as viable political entities with a basic understanding of and ability to articulate policy concerns of the government and citizenry, by helping them in the areas of organization, understanding functions, opinion research, campaign planning, and coalition-building.

Indicator: Political organizations will become less elite-driven and more grassroots oriented, and increasingly responsive to local constituencies.

*After IRI meetings with local elders in Kunduz, Mazar-i Sharif, Jalalabad, and Kandahar independent-minded opinion-makers began to organize themselves so as to compete with the unpopular but powerful political parties, in advance even of official IRI training to be conducted in April and May. Initial meetings were well received*

## **V. EVALUATION**

Although work during the quarter started off slowly, much progress has been made by IRI since the new RCD's arrival in February. After traveling to five provinces to meet and discuss parliamentary elections with IRI partners and local leaders, IRI crafted a new work plan, additional funding budget, and a week by week training schedule. As the quarter ended IRI was preparing for its first training of trainers session and begin executing a ambitious five month training program.

## **VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES**

### *Parliamentary Election Programming*

Polling conducted by IRI in the past strongly indicates that political parties are unpopular with Afghan voters, and the government has adopted an electoral system that favors independent candidates. There is concern in the aid community, however, that such a system will lead to a technically unmanageable number of candidates, and most aid efforts are concentrated on the development of the existing political parties to the exclusion of independents.

IRI has developed a three-phase program to help even the playing field between the independents and the better-funded and organized political parties. First, IRI will demonstrate the benefits of collective-action to the independents and encourage them to form provincial coalitions that will better be able to marshal the votes necessary to elect their candidates; this will both reduce the complexity of the ballot and decrease the likelihood that large numbers of independent candidates will cancel out one another's votes.

Beginning with its current network of local opinion-makers cultivated through previous and continuing civic education efforts, IRI will expand these provincial coalitions to include as many distinct populations of independents as possible: urban, rural, female, intellectual, etc. These individual provincial coalitions will then be encouraged to collectivize on the national level, electing officers to represent their interests to the media and the government in Kabul.

Second, IRI will train the candidates nominated by the provincial coalitions in the skills required to run an effective electoral campaign. Furthermore, the national representatives

of the independents will be trained in media and government interaction so as to strengthen the individual candidates everywhere they are running.

Third, as Election Day approaches in September IRI will institute a poll-watcher training program to prepare representatives of the independent coalitions to observe the voting and counting process. Further training will be devoted to coalition candidates on voter mobilization.

## ATTACHMENTS

### Attachment 1: Prospective Independent Candidate Curriculum

#### **Prospective Independent Candidate & Coalition-Building Information Session:**

#### I. Role of the Parliament

##### 1. General

- The parliament is the voice of the people
- More powerful than the President: Can pass laws, spend money, approve appointments
- Representatives from all over the country will be elected and sit in the parliament. This is your chance to elect your representative, someone you know and trust, to speak for you.

##### 2. Afghan Governing Bodies: The National Assembly and Local Councils

##### a. National Assembly consists of two bodies: Wolesi Jirga and Meshrano Jirga All legislation must pass both bodies, except for the budget (just Wolesi)

- Wolesi Jirga
  - Primary legislative body; very powerful
  - 249 seats divided up by province
- Meshrano Jirga
  - 1/3 appointed by President
  - 1/3 elected by Provincial Councils
  - 1/3 elected by District Councils

##### b. The Local Councils: Provincial and District

\*\*Primary responsibility is to elect Meshrano Jirga; may also have local governing duties



- Provincial Councils
  - Members are elected province-wide
  - Each Provincial Council will elect one member to the Meshrano Jirga
  - Number of members depends upon size of the province
- District Councils
  - Members are elected by district
  - District councils for the entire province will meet to elect one member of the Meshrano Jirga
  - Number of members depends upon the size of the district

## II. Afghan Electoral System

1. Upcoming elections: September 18; Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council; District elections delayed
2. Candidates will be elected province-wide
3. Registered political parties can field a slate of candidates
4. Independent candidates may also run
5. A candidate's name, picture, and party name (if they have one) will appear on the ballot. The symbol of the party will also appear on the ballot; in the case of Independent candidates, they will choose a symbol from a pre-existing list when the file to appear on the ballot
6. Voters will receive two ballots; one for Wolesi Jirga and one for Provincial Council
7. They have one vote for each ballot; they vote for one Wolesi Jirga and one Council candidate
8. The candidates with the most votes win; must include two women from every province
  - If there are 8 seats, the top two women will win + the top 6 men
  - Where there are only two seats, one goes to a woman

### III. How to Become a Candidate

**\*\*Filing period opens April 30 and closes May 19**

#### 1. Qualifications

- Shall be an Afghan citizen or shall have obtained citizenship at least ten years prior to candidacy
- Shall not have been convicted of crimes against humanity, as well as a crime or deprivation of civil rights by a court
- Shall have reached 25 years of age on candidacy for the *Wolesi Jirga*
- Only run for *Wolesi Jirga* or Provincial Council, not both
- Be a registered voter, and prove this fact by presentation of the candidate's Voter Registration Card
- Not have non-official military forces or belong to such
- Have resigned from any positions of public office pursuant to Article 13 of the Electoral Law

#### 2. Requirements

- Present a list of voters who support their candidacy in the constituency in which they wish to stand for election (a list of 300 supporters is required for *Wolesi Jirga* elections and 200 for Provincial Council elections)
- Provide a monetary deposit at the time of filing candidacy papers, which will be returned if the candidate is elected or receives more than 2% of the votes (10,000 Afghani for *Wolesi Jirga* candidates and 4,000 Afghani for Provincial Council)
- Sign a Code of Conduct for Candidates which regulates the behaviour of candidates
- Present nomination papers at offices authorised by the JEMB to receive candidate nominations, and sign a statement that all information provided is correct

### IV. Independent Coalition-Building

#### 1. PROBLEM: The Advantages of the Political Parties

- a. Political parties have money, manpower, organization, coordination, a head start

- b. Independents stand alone: no money, no organization, no coordination, no one to help
  - c. That's why Independents need to organize themselves
    - That way, they, too, will have all the benefits of organizing and collective action
    - It's easy to break one stick, but you can't break a bundle of sticks
2. SOLUTION: Independent Coalition-Building
- a. An organization of Independents
  - b. Province-wide, with representatives from the districts
  - c. Declaration of Principles
    - Keep it simple:
      - Support Democracy
      - Renounce violence, coercion, intimidation
      - No connection to warlords
      - No connection to the opium trade
      - Promise to represent the Afghan people
  - d. Hold a province-wide meeting
    - Sign declaration of principles
    - Elect a chair to preside over meeting
    - Select candidates
    - Elect officers
    - Set up local committees
    - Gather everyone's name and contact information
  - e. But the job's not finished at that point: Actively support those candidates, helping them win
    - Help them get on the ballot: Raise money for filing fee; collect signatures
    - Help spread the word
    - Help turn out the vote
  - f. These Independent candidates pool their resources, work together

- Share in the cost of ads, posters, flyers
- Build an organization that will help them all get elected
- For example, I can only afford 1,000 flyers and my fellow Independent candidate can also only afford 1,000; but if we pool our resources, we will have 2,000 flyers with BOTH of our names/pictures on it. And we will also have my friends AND his friends passing them out.

g. The end result:

- Coalitions in every province, in alliance with each other
- Focus on winning a couple of seats; if every province's coalition did this, you would have the largest bloc of seats
- These Independent candidates then work together in the parliament
- And you have an organization that can put pressure on the government

### 3. Qualities you want in candidates

a. The first, you know: Smart, honest, honorable etc.

b. But second: this is a democracy and you need someone who can win. If they can't win, they can't change things.

- Need someone who is popular, who knows a lot of people, and a lot of people like him
- It takes money to run and win, and you need someone who has it or who can get it

c. You have to spread out your candidates

- Different tribes
- Different parts of the province
- If they are from same area, same tribe, they will all lose

d. You don't want to run a full slate

- If you run too many candidates, you'll be spreading yourself too thin. Focus your limited resources, organization, and support on fewer candidates.

### 4. Selecting a slate of candidates; an example

a. Take an inventory

- How many seats for Wolesi Jirga? For Provincial Council?
  - What are the largest villages, cities, parts of the province?
  - What are the different ethnic groups?
  - What are the different tribes?
  - How many people voted in the presidential election?
- b. For our example, let's assume there are 10 seats available
  - c. Two of those seats will go to women; select one woman candidate
  - d. The 8 remaining seats will be for men
  - e. Select roughly half that number of candidates; remember, just try to win a few seats
  - f. Choose people from different parts of the province, different tribes, ethnic groups
  - g. For our example, let's assume 400,000 people voted in the presidential from this area
  - h. Therefore, each of the ten seats will represent roughly 40,000 people; rough estimate of number of votes needed; won't be more than that.
  - i. And each of our four candidates should therefore have an area of 100,000 votes for each from which to draw the 30-40,000 votes they will need to win.
  - j. Also, make sure your woman candidate is from a large area that will back her.
  - k. Make sure your candidates can get the money and the signatures to get on the ballot!

## V. The Next Steps

### 1. Before you leave

- Make sure you have contact info WADAN local contact
- Make sure that we have your name and contact info
- Join our phone tree so information can get to all of you quickly
- Let's agree on a time and place when you will select candidates

### 2. After you leave

- Call a meeting in your village and tell them what you have learned here
- Send people to neighboring villages to pass on what you have learned here; tell them about the next meeting
- Sign-up other people as well, not just maliks; make sure you send their names to us
- Start thinking about good candidates
- Start collecting signatures; have the people in your village sign the petitions so you can pass it along to the coalition's candidates

- Start raising money; ask people in your village to donate money so that the coalition's candidates can get on the ballot; even a few Afghanis each can add up if enough people contribute